

# The HILLS of PERU



LOUISE WILHELMINA MEARS, Ed.D.



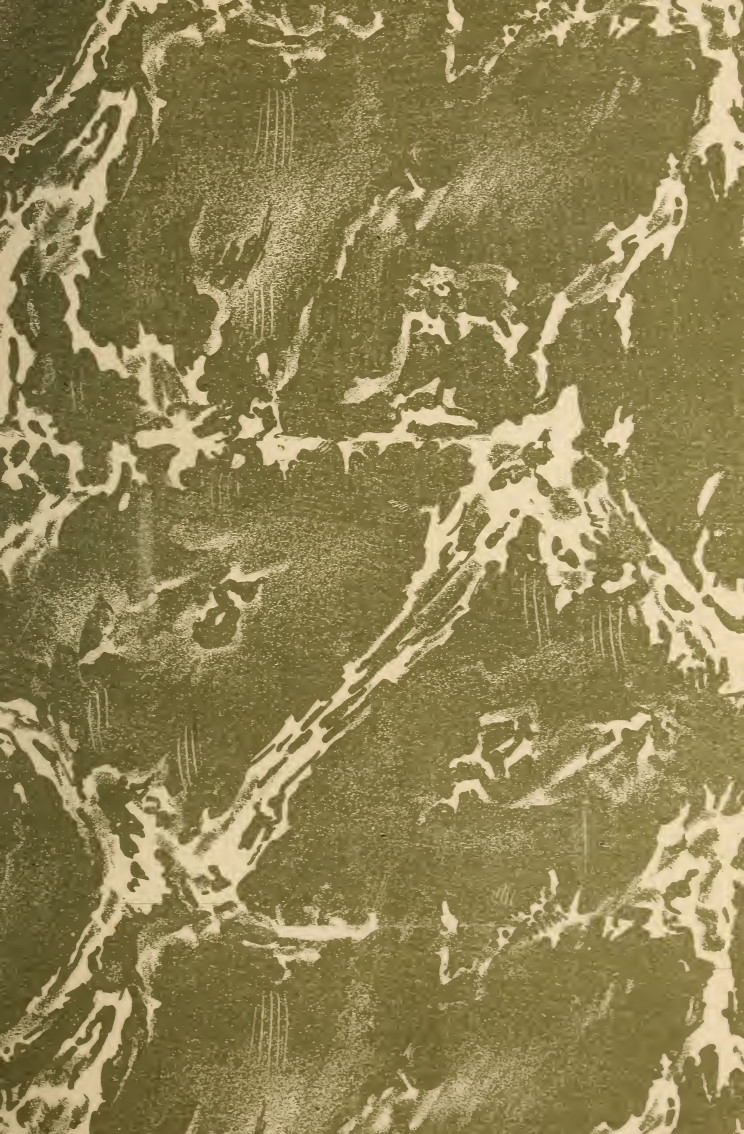
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*Louise Wilhelmina Mears. Ed. B.*

—The—  
*Hills of Peru*

A GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL  
SKETCH



1911

By

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE CLASS  
OF 1895 N. S. N. S., THAT TRAMPED OVER  
THE HILLS OF PERU FOR YEARS IN SEARCH  
OF WILD FLOWERS, INSECTS CREEPING AND  
FLYING, LAND AND WATER BIRDS, ROCKS  
AND RARE FOSSILS.

PRESS OF  
KLOPP & BARTLETT CO.  
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-Phil House-1911

## Preface.

HE fact that Peru and its environs are unusually rich in geographic material, led me to prepare several sketches to be used in the study of local geography. These chapters, which in order to be accessible to Peru students appeared in the *Normalite*, 1910-11, were the beginning of what has developed into this small book on Peru. The geographical and historical development could not well be separated, and the pioneer period especially has received prominence. This book does not make any claims, however, to be a history of Peru. Considering the hundreds of young people who annually make Peru their temporary home, and the larger number that have gone out from its classic shades, a handbook of the village and the picturesque walks



## PREFACE


and drives about it may serve as a guide and a reminder to them.

My debt of gratitude to the pioneers themselves is great for information generously given. Especially do I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Messrs. D. C. Cole, Dr. J. F. Neal, Col. T. J. Majors, Abner Carlisle, William Phelps, Sylvester Reed, W. W. Whitfield, George Heywood and Major William Daily; Mesdames, Charles Neal, D. C. Cole, Richard Vance, Arthur Brunsdon, H. M. Mears and Jarvis Church; also to Robert Harvey, Vice President Nebraska Historical Society, Mrs. S. W. McGrew, Secretary Nemaha County Historical Society, Miss Eleanor Lally, Dr. Homer C. House, Prof. H. B. Duncanson and Prof. C. R. Weeks of the Nebraska State Normal School, Peru, Nebraska.

July 1, 1911

# Introduction.

OUT OF DOORS IN PERU.

OR those who have ever climbed one of Peru's hills, or looked out from the windows of the Normal School, or taken in the beauty from the tower, the words of this brief sketch are all unnecessary, unless perchance, to awaken fond recollections of a panorama that the pen can put poorly portray and memory can never let go. Those who have been initiated will all agree that no one can offer a fair estimate of Peru who has not looked out from the top of one of the many hills among which the village lies.

The experienced traveler, wherever he may be, hastens to find the highest point of land from which to get his bearings in a new country. If he is in Paris, he climbs to the top of Eiffel Tower, perhaps, and there with map in hand, he takes a bird's-eye view of the

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Seine with its many windings, and the extensive forest of the famous Bois de Boulogne, but—incredible as the statement may seem—all that he may see in this French landscape does not surpass the beauty that awaits one who looks out from Pike's Peak or Mt. Vernon Hill at Peru, when the lights of morning or evening outline the distant hills.

Standing on Pike's Peak, one sees to the north the fertile flood plain at the foot of the westward curving hills, where cattle graze and rich crops grow. The river makes a mighty bend to the east around these acres of rich bottom-land, but they are nevertheless the river's own, to which it lays claim year by year. Diagonally across the level land extends the Burlington Railroad, and yet another and newer construction is the drainage ditch, which connects Buck Creek and Camp Creek with the Missouri River. Here in winter the Peru boys and girls emulate the Dutch children skating upon the canals.

Along the river banks, in thick stands the willows grow, the little pussy-



## INTRODUCTION

willow and the larger black willow. At a distance their dense green leafage suggests a more enduring forest than this plant of rapid growth, that springs up in a season to take possession of newly made river-banks and island bars. Nature makes use of this plant with its matted net-work of roots to hold the soft sands. Man employs it for riprapping along the banks. The width of the river is not readily determined by the observer, for wooded islands are easily mistaken for the opposite shore. Nor does the old river betray any suggestion of its mighty current, seeming often as calm as the sleeping giant of old. Well does the old timer of Peru know the danger of toying with its treacherous waters, and his life is quite apart from it now that steamboats no longer call him to its shores. Many have forgotten where the boat-landing used to be and the row of ware-houses along the water front, swallowed up by the river more than a quarter of a century ago. The farther the eye travels across the river, the more beautiful the

## INTRODUCTION

view becomes. There the Iowa hills appear veiled in hazy blue, or dimmed by blowing sands until they resemble thin clouds. Truly,

“ 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,  
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.”

Have you ever climbed the long hill to Mt. Vernon Cemetery? With conscious effort you walk up the long grade, head bowed, eyes downcast when, pausing to get your breath, you lift your gaze to the horizon, and suddenly all your weariness disappears under the magic of the scene spread in unmeasured expanse before you. Then the world is beautiful indeed! The village in the valley below! The Normal School buildings rising above the oak forest like Heidelberg Castle on the German hillsides! And, as evening approaches, the deep green foliage starred with electric lights!

Old Peru, aside from its being a term of endearment in school songs and sayings, reminds one that as a Nebraska town it has attained an advanced age. Situated in the corner of the state earli-

## INTRODUCTION

est settled, it has passed the half-century mark, and possesses a history of its own. It has gone through the usual stages of a river town, deserted by boats and even by the river itself; but it has fared better than most of these towns, in that a State Normal School was located here and became the seat of early education and culture in Nebraska. The individual atmosphere that time alone can give a school and town is beginning to manifest itself, and that atmosphere, if it were to be described, might rightfully be characterized as educational, in the highest sense.

Nature does and will exert its influence over the mind. As the northern poets of England reflect the beauty of the Lake Region, or Scott's novels give out the spirit of the Highlands, so the hills, forest and stream stimulate the imagination at Peru. The youthful fancy, in the most formative period, far removed from distracting influences, may here follow those quiet paths that lead to true wisdom and natural development.



# The Hills of Peru.

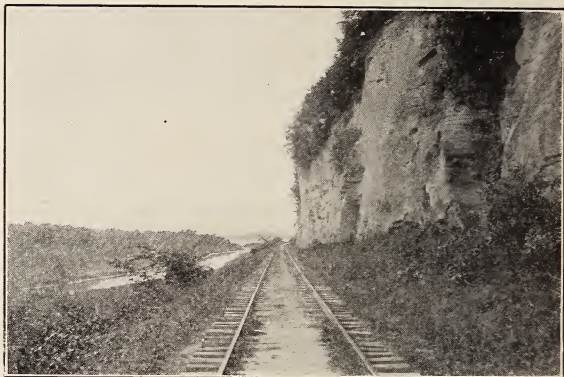
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## CHAPTER I.

### PERU IN STEAMBOAT DAYS.

**P**ERU has passed through some marked changes since the flowery days of the steam boat, yet the changes could hardly have been greater in a hundred years—for the mighty river itself has left the old town high and dry, with the landmarks of steamboat days so obscured by time that one must ask the oldest inhabitant to point out where things “used to be.” Where the boats were wont to land in the early days, amid the excitement of interested townsfolk, the willows have grown repeatedly into forests, and a drainage ditch cuts through the little patches of corn and melons upon the fickle river sands.

The boat-landing was southeast of old Peru, where now the railroad meets the bluff and begins its course upon the narrow road-bed between the bluff and



*Where Cliff  
and River  
Meet.*

the river. Two warehouses stood here, although not a vestige of them remains to tell the story of the barrels and barrels of brown sugar that found their way here from the Louisiana cane-fields. The sweet memory of bursted barrels remains in the minds of many a man now grown gray, who can tell entertaining stories of barefooted boys that frequented the boat-landing, and climbed over barrels and boxes in the warehouses, where lock and key were unknown. Sacks of flour from Green's mill lay in white piles on the wharf,

waiting for the boat to come along and pick them up.

The Peru merchant watched eagerly for the boat that was to bring him his first stock of merchandise and set him up in business, attracting trade from the wide countryside in the days when neighboring towns, save for Brownville the metropolis, were not much more than post offices. Even Missouri, just across the river, contributed her share of patronage to the Peru merchant, and the arrival of the tall lank Missourian, reflecting the lordly air of the southern planter, created some stir on the village street and in the tiny crowded stores. Make way for the Missourian! A large slouch hat shaded his unshaven face. His longness was accentuated by his high boots, one trouser tucked in and the other bulging above the boot-top. The cords and cords of cotton-wood which he brought over to Peru on rafts, or hauled across the ice on sleds, were his chief medium of exchange. At a price which never exceeded two dollars per cord, he exchanged his cotton-wood



for tobacco, groceries or calico perhaps. The region from which he hailed was called, in sly humor, the "dogwoods." The pink blossoms of the dogwood tree still herald the spring time "across the river," but the typical dogwooder now exists only in the memory.

In steamboat days Main Street ran to the river, and the proud name still clings to it on the village map. Who of to-day will believe that this steep grassy road, extending down from Indian Hill eastward, between the stores belonging to David Jack and Richard Vance, and on to the railroad track, was once a veritable main street? This was the busy highway of steamboat days—not more than four blocks long, worn with water-gullies, and to this day unflanked by sidewalks. A steep old street it has ever been, and the two houses that stand at the summit, where the road begins, (now owned by Dr. Cap Graves and Mr. Mardis) are landmarks of steamboat times, that even today are beholden for their roominess and endurance. For more than a decade the Post

Office stood at the foot of the hill, facing east, at the corner of Main and Fifth Streets. Had we been land speculators in the early '70s, we should have invested in lots on this same Main Street that climbed from the old river westward, up to Indian Hill back of the village school.

A bridge also enters into this drama of human events. Did you ever pause to think of the story that a bridge in a new country tells? Men are not likely to construct bridges for sparsely traveled roads, neither are they ready to provide bridges for roads soon to be abandoned. A few travelers may ford the creek, or a raft of logs is made to serve as a temporary bridge. It so happened that historic Main Street was crossed by a creek about one block east of Fifth Street. The creek had worn a deep ravine in the rockless clay, on its way to the Missouri, and offered a serious obstacle to traffic with the river front. Every boy of lower Peru has waded in this muddy evanescent creek, which today follows in the rear of the present business sec-

tion, and where today it pleads for a Municipal Improvement Association to rescue it from the unsightly waste of every adjacent back door.

In steamboat days a bridge was built across the creek on Main Street, just south of Green's flour mill, and the road followed the bluffs eastward around to the river. Twice a week the steamboat arrived, bringing the barrels and sacks of merchandise from St. Joseph, Mo. When the long hoarse whistle of the steamboat sounded, a stir arose in the village. Mark Twain describes the scene perfectly. He knew so well what life was like in an old river town when he wrote, "The clerks wake up, a furious clatter of drays follows, every house and store pours out a human contribution, and all in a twinkling the dead town is alive and moving. Drays, carts, men, boys, all go hurrying from many quarters to a common center, the wharf. Assembled there, the people fasten their eyes upon the coming boat as upon a wonder that they are seeing for the first time."

That there was always keen interest in a steamboat's arrival, is not to be wondered at, for more varied and interesting cargoes than these passenger-freight boats brought could hardly be imagined. A white steamboat riding along so smoothly is always a pretty sight—the "fire-canoe," as the Indians called it—and the interest shown by the townspeople who line the shore is reciprocated by the curious passengers, pressing close to the rail on the deck. Sometimes there were soldiers aboard going to the forts, or, as in the 60's, accompanying the boat as a guard.

All in the brief space of fifteen or



*Birds-eye  
View of  
River and  
Bluff*

twenty minutes a glimpse of the outside world was opened up to the villagers. The sight of brightly uniformed men in those ominous times was one not to be missed. The boats often carried Indian agents and annuities and supplies for the Indians. There were men going to the mines in Montana, Mormons migrating to Utah, black-robed Jesuit priests and other missionaries. Indeed! history records the fact that Abraham Lincoln, when a young statesman not yet talked of for the presidency, made a river trip from St. Louis or St. Joseph to Council Bluffs, with that most famous of river pilots, Capt. La Barge. He must then have passed Peru.

Then there was the loading and the unloading of a boat! Always a scene of lively interest, but especially so when sheer human force did the work. The stern commands of the captain, or the lively feats of the negro roustabouts never grew old to the villagers. If the boat was making the trip all the way from St. Louis to Fort Benton, Mont., which was regarded as the head of navi-

gation, you can well believe that the assortment of freight and passengers in those early days was a varied one indeed. \$50,000 would not buy the empty boat!

Most of the merchandise from Peru had been put on board at St. Joseph, where the Hannibal & St. Joseph R.R., completed in 1859, connected with the river trade. "A line of packets including three boats ran south to Kansas City and north to Sioux City, with an occasional trip to Ft. Randall, in 1859." When the Chicago & North-Western R.R. reached Council Bluffs in '67, and the Union Pacific bridge was opened across the river in '72, Omaha largely supplanted St. Joseph in the upper river trade.

The railroad reached Peru in 1875, and around this date there clings a volume of local history, rich in incident and humor. The first "Excursion to the Capital" was an opportunity embraced by not a few of the Peruvians. The cars were crowded, and only a fortunate few found room in the "caboose"

that finished up the line of "box-cars." Ask some old settler of Peru about that first excursion to Lincoln, and mark the smile of remembrance that comes over his face. Middle-aged men took their first ride on a railroad, Sunday school teachers chaperoned their classes, and a newly married couple enjoyed a wedding tour. The excursion left Peru early one morning and returned about three o'clock the next morning. On the way back from Lincoln, the engine left a section of the train at the grade near Dunbar, and took only a part on to Nebraska City, returning later to get the other section. But our story must not digress too far from our theme, the steamboat days.

Major Chittenden, that master historian of the Missouri, says that the golden era of steamboating on the Missouri was from 1850-60, just before the advent of railroads. "No other period before or after approached it in the splendor of the boats. All the boats were side-wheelers, had full length cabins, and were fitted up more for



passengers than for freight. It was the era of fast boats and racing."

Peruvians sometimes indulged in the festive pleasure excursions on the river. The accounts of such pleasure trips, from Peru to St. Joseph in the early '70s, have been handed down to us by our mothers and fathers, who were the young blood of that picturesque period. In our mind's eye we see a party of happy expectant young men and women waiting at the boat landing for the grand holiday trip. The Peru band is a feature, for, to be sure, Peru is not lacking in enterprise, and there is something of that Southern spirit among those early settlers that takes a holiday gracefully. The trim and even elegant appearance of the ladies and gentlemen reveals that a boat excursion is an occasion for some style and show. In the moonlight hours, on the broad steamer deck, they trip the light fantastic to the spirited music of the Peru band, which, by the way, was no mean musical organization. Ladies in sweeping trains and fluffy polonaise graced the deck. A

fashionable gown worn on this occasion is one of the beautiful relics of steam-boat days now owned by a daughter of a Peru pioneer. The pale green and white organdie, beautifully designed, reflects the taste and elegance of Brownville's leading modiste.

This paper has made no mention thus far of the boats engaged in ferrying passengers across the river. Old settlers in Peru tell us that they have seen as many as fifty or sixty wagons waiting to be ferried across to Missouri, and then to drive to Sonora and Watson.

Sonora, once a hamlet of tiny houses and a white church that was a landmark easily discerned from the hills of Peru, has been claimed by the river. The old settler of Peru ascends the high hill to where Mt. Vernon Cemetery lies, and looking across the river and island-bars, he points out where Sonora used to be.

After the railroad came, the boats made less and less frequent stops here. Many of them still rode majestically by on the old river, but their cargoes had changed to government supplies of one

kind or another, such as fort supplies and rip-rapping for the river work.

In contrast with those stirring scenes on the old river front, we have the incident of a lonely steamer that called here at Peru some fourteen years ago, with a load of merchandise. The whistles blew for several hours before being able to attract the attention of the Peruvians. No one was expecting a boat to call at this point, and the old town had entirely outgrown the habit of responding to the whistle of a steamboat. Its arrival was witnessed by a botany class that was collecting flowers along the river-side, and the amazement of the class was exceeded only by their amusement, when the negro deckhands commenced to roll the barrels and boxes across the gang plank, singing lustily at their work. It was like an echo of steamboat days.

The fishermen of to-day, almost the only townsmen who frequent the river now, can perhaps tell us most about these boats that glide silently by our town in the summer months, on errands

unknown to us. The broad flood plain that the river has built up in the last quarter of a century lies between us and the water highway.

And what of Peru, bereft of its chief attraction, the river? Slowly, but surely it has crept up the long hill to the south, as if to look down from serene heights upon the fickle, whimsical river. Its real Main Street now runs at right angles to the one her founders honored with that name. The direction of the axis of this little world of ours has changed, so to speak. The main axis now leads toward the state school on the hill.

One of the first teachers of music in the Normal School, Professor D. B. Worley, composed a beautiful song in honor of an old river, a song much loved by the musical students of those early days. A faded copy, still extant, bears the date 1865. Dear to the memory are the voices of those, now silent, who sang the sweet refrain:

“By the side of the deep rolling river,  
I have wandered for many a day.  
Where the roses so sweetly are blooming,  
And the wood-birds are singing so gay.”

## CHAPTER II.

### INDIAN HILL.



CLIMBED old Indian Hill at dusk, at the hour when the veil of mystery and charm was falling upon the real world—an enchanting hour for renewing an acquaintance with the spot made dear by childhood memories. Every prospect was pleasing in the newness of spring, and every grassy slope was a feast to the eye. Unconscious of choosing a view from out this panorama, I seated myself facing the pictured east, over which the disappearing sun was throwing its last lingering light.

My eye passed beyond the foreground, across the silver river, to the horizon hills in Iowa. These bare hills have always been the playground of lights and shadows that make a thousand varying pictures every day. Many an afternoon I have spent watching the changes of light and color reflected by

the rock surfaces. Nearly always a soft haze veils the tops, and there is all the beauty of eastern mountain scenery. Many a summer day, through drooping eyes, I have looked at these hills when they were not Iowa hills at all, but the blue peaks and crags of the Adirondacks. Sometimes their soft violet beauty was lighted by a patch of brilliant gold that flitted from peak to valley, and disappeared as instantaneously as it came. Sometimes clouds of yellow sand, blowing above the river bars, obscured the hills and robbed them of their soft loveliness. This evening from my observatory on Indian Hill, the view was like a rare old stained glass window, which in dim rich light suggested that far-away shore that painters have pictured as the home of the soul.

Tonight, once more as of old on the hills of Peru, I live over again those lovely lines of Goldsmith:

Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's  
close,  
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;  
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,

The mingling notes came softened from below;  
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,  
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.

The question has often been debated in my mind, as to which were the more beautiful,—the bare sharply outlined hills of Iowa, or the wooded slopes of Nebraska. Finally, I compromised with myself by deciding that the bare hills lend themselves best in the distance to that enchantment of which the poet speaks, while the green forested slopes are loveliest near at hand; and here at Peru this ideal arrangement greets the eye.

The broad flood plain lying between the hills and the winding river appears level indeed tonight, spread out like a checker-board of ploughed squares and brown pastures. Here and there straw-stacks appear as misty shapes in the descending twilight. For a little while, a bright line of flame, far away near the horizon, blazes up in the north, the spring burning of cornstalks that illuminates the sky with pale yellow flames, so familiar to childhood memories.



When the curtain of shadow had fallen over the distant hills, and the river was no longer discernible, my visible world narrowed down to Indian Hill, where I sat—an Indian burial ground and the site of the village school. Before the white man came to this spot, the Indians had buried their dead here, and here it was that they returned to visit the graves of their forefathers. They were bands of Otoes from the reservation on the Blue River near the Kansas borderline. Sometimes they passed through Peru on their way to visit other bands of Indians, for they were fond of visiting, and sometimes they came to Peru to trade. On the backs of their ponies, they carried flour from Green's mill, seventy-five miles to their reservation. Peru merchants sold them calico and blankets at fine prices. Sometimes the Indians passed through the village on their way to the hunting grounds in Iowa. The Indian agent tells what a fine sight it was to see them swimming their ponies across the Missouri, for the pony was their medium of travel on land and water.

The founders of Peru—and some of the most potent of those pioneers are still living to enjoy the fruits of their labors—chose Indian Hill for the location of the district school. High up, on the long south slope of the hill, the modest one-room structure rose, to bear the name of District Number Three, and its territory extended considerably beyond the limits of the town in all directions. The schoolhouse faced the sunny south, with the steepest part of Indian Hill at its back between it and the cold north winds. The playground was one long slope, except for a broad bare terrace at the east, kept smooth and hard by ceaseless play.

Is there not a natural curiosity among folks to want to know the beginnings of things, and has not this desire often led to a search for truth that has rescued history from the obscurity of tradition? Then let us bind together the stories of the remote past of old Peru, while yet the actors in that early drama of courage and endurance may contribute their valuable experiences.

The district school was built in 1870, three years after our statehood, by the building contractors, Daniel C. Cole, who did the carpenter work, and H. M. Mears, the first lumber merchant in Peru. The first teacher in this district school was Isaac Black, the father of the unfortunate young man who was drowned in the Missouri river a few days before his coming graduation in the Normal School in 1872. Until last year, when the bluffs along the Missouri were blasted away to make room for the new railroad-bed east of town, the name of this much mourned young man was conspicuous among those carvings in the rocks, where the early students of the Normal School were wont to leave their names recorded. The letters were cut deep in the rock, and old settlers never failed to recite the tragic story which the name recalled, and to warn their children against the treacherous old Missouri. The spring term of the district school was taught by Illinois Tate (Mrs. Chas. Neal), who presided over a flock of eighty or more children,

and the next year Anna Moorhead (Mrs. W. A. Joy), the first graduate of the Normal School, taught here; and thus, the school began under the direction of noble men and women. Church services were held in the schoolhouse by itinerant preachers of various denominations.

This school on Indian Hill was not the first district school in Peru, however. As long as twelve years before this, a school had been started farther down the hill, a block south of Indian Hill, where the present residence of Dr. Fairchild stands. Of this school, J. Manktello was the first teacher, and it later became the property of the district. This school is no doubt referred to in the History of Nebraska, published in 1882, wherein the account of it and of the one on Indian Hill seem to be somewhat confounded.

Indian Hill is one of those compact clay hills, less than a hundred feet high, among which Peru lies. It is really the east end, or the beginning, of a long

ridge that extends westward and increases in height for about a mile. It would be hard to say which was the steepest slope, for time and grading have changed its outline. Old Main Street ascends it from the east, and the road to the Normal School meets it on the south.

Of the long south slope I wish to speak, for there was the playground of every village child. The grade was broken by natural terraces, or cat-steps, and a coarse grass grew in bunches upon it. Flowers seldom appeared there. A tiny grass-flower and the Indian turnip could hardly be counted as conspicuous. There were narrow paths leading over the hill, like those on Pike's Peak today. The earliest settlers do not know when these paths came, and in our imagination we see the Indians traveling single file along them, for no doubt they are the old Indian highways. Even as late as the '80's, there was a belief among us children that the Indians might come back. We thrilled with terror at the thought, and sometimes on drowsy

summer days, when the hum of the schoolroom was particularly conducive to day-dreams, I thought I saw a dusky face peer in at the window, and ask in a blood-chilling whisper, "What have you done with our graves?"

The question was only the suggestion of my guilty conscience, for we children dug and carved and excavated into the side of Indian Hill as if it had never been a hallowed spot but had been created solely for the delight of busy little hands. Sometimes we came upon an arrow-head or a stone tomahawk to remind us of a prior claim. The soil, known geologically as Loess, is so firm, so compact and so fine-grained that it was a delight to little sculptors. Our playhouses were unique. We carved flights of stairs, seats and tables, and hollowed out ovens. The small boys excavated tunnels and owned a cave on the very top of the hill, that had the same attraction for the boys that Mark Twain ascribes to Tom Sawyer's "Robber Cave." The rain and the wind did not destroy our handiwork, and this

fact suggests the experiences of early settlers with this marvelous compact soil. It is true that good wells, fifty and sixty feet deep, were made in Peru with almost no brick facing, perhaps a short wall down at the water stratum, and a similar one just below the curb, to keep out surface water. These wells, and also cave-cellars dug fifteen years ago without bricking or cementing, are still intact. As we observe the Peru workman spading a gutter or excavating a cistern, we see the smooth firm finish that the soil takes, clean and brown, not a grain crumbling. Workmen acknowledge a pleasure in cutting into this soil, and with the school-children, digging into the hillside never lost its charm. My fingers still tingle for the feel of the clay.

There were no walks leading to our school on the hill, and yet I cannot recall much annoyance from mud. The run-off after a rain was very rapid, and we kept the paths and "marble ground"



beaten hard. Sometimes we paused to use a scraper on our shoes at the doorstep, but most of the time our overworked teachers were so concerned about the lightness of our heads that they gave little heed to the weight of our feet. The bare-footed boy had the advantage. Many a time I have seen him outline with his dexterous toe the circle for the marble game, or mark the field for "dare-base." An experience that the boys regarded as a marked privilege was to go after water. This necessitated a trip down the steep hill to the town well. Once we knew that the boys had started out with the pail, we became more thirsty every moment. Our tongues became parched. Study was abandoned while we watched the two boys laboring up the hill and lamented over the spilled water that splashed on their bare feet. When the boys finally came upon the school grounds and there was no longer any doubt about a water supply, a wild waving of hands began in the school, beseeching for permission to pass the



water; and when the teacher had honored a pupil with the distinction of "passing the water"—there was only one dipper—a murmur of disappointment went over the room, and a whispered, "She passed it yesterday!"

There was always a spell of weather in the winter when coasting absorbed all our spare time. This pleasure was paramount, and we were unmoved by threats or persuasion from the school-room. Conditions for coasting were ideal. One could hardly find another such place. The momentum with which we slid down Indian Hill sent us partly up Normal Hill. There was no walking back, for we came down Normal Hill with force enough to take us halfway up Indian Hill. A charming sport, with no convenient place to end! The cold weather seemed to have a benumbing effect upon our little consciences, for boys assured the teacher with an air of conviction, "I never heard the bell." From the highest and most distant point on our coasting grounds, not far from the Normal School, we could see

our teacher at the door of the district school, swinging the large handbell to and fro, stopping now and again to shade her eyes to see if the clanging bell was making any impression upon her strayed flock.

But those days are gone! A two-story brick structure has displaced the old schoolhouse. The paths are gone, and a series of steps lead up to the south entrance. The hilltop has been leveled down somewhat to afford a building site. Quantities of Indian bones were unearthed some six feet below the sur-




*The Modern Brick Building on Indian Hill.*

face. A part, however, of the old summit is still left on the west. The face of the pinkish yellow cliff is swept clean by the winds. A few holes dug in the hill resemble the borings of sand swallows as compared with our subterranean passages. Four giant oaks still stand. May they be spared to complete their life story! As live and as green as they is the memory of the school days in the old District School on Indian Hill.



## CHAPTER III

### THE LOST LANDMARK.

ERU came near having a vine covered ruin as a picturesque landmark on one of its hillsides, in the old part of town. There, on a hill rich in pioneer associations, it gave promise of weathering a century of years and outliving its newest neighbors. I refer to a well-built, little brick church erected in 1869, on the first hill that skirts the road, as one enters old Peru from the north.

The reader must not confound this hill with the one best known of all Peru's hills, Pike's Peak—the village child's first conception of a mountain. One sees Pike's Peak first of all as he approaches the town from the north, where it rises, sheer and brown, from the level lowlands. On the north and east the sides are steep, and the Indian path has become a narrow gulley; but the long south slope is a stretch of lovely

green, where cattle pasture most of the year. Pike's Peak is, in fact, the east end of a range that borders the bottom lands, broken only rarely by a ravine, through which a creek enters and finds its way to the river. The hill stands as a sentinel over the town, a high point from which Indian beacon fires may have signaled far across the river. If we count it as the first hill in the landscape in Peru, then our reader must travel a few paces farther into the town to reach the one upon which the little church stood.

In the days before the river had begun encroaching upon the rich bottom-lands north of town, a goodly number of

*Pike's  
Peak*



*The  
Bottoms*

farmers had settled there. They could see the white cross of the church some miles away—for no tree at that time hid any house from view—and as they walked into the town on a Sunday evening the light shone rich and soft through the colored windows.

The church site must have seemed a very desirable one to the builders—high and commanding, centrally located, removed from the street, and yet in the same block with the Post Office that stood on the busy corner of Fifth and Main Streets. To my readers, this way of locating a lost landmark by its nearness to the post office long since removed, may seem rather shadowy, but not so to any venerable Peruvian, I ween, whose mind's eye sees them both as clearly as if but yesterday the red brick church and the corner-store Post Office stood on the hill, with doors facing the east, and worn paths leading to them. As the steamboats rounded the big bend above Peru, the landmark, sighted from afar, was this church, set high on the first hill, and it was from

this selfsame hill that Peruvians looked northward to catch the first glimpse of the boat coming down from Nebraska City. When it appeared, a speck on the horizon, above the Lone Tree Landing, it was still a long way off from the Peru landing; and while it wound its way around the big bend, there was yet ample time for the Peruvian to don his traveling attire, and hasten to the boat-landing. Thus pioneer days had their compensations as well as their hardships. The Indian agent, whose home was on the slope of the hill, was one of these impromptu travelers. His eldest daughter still refers to the time when it was her responsible commission to watch for the boats from the hill-top, and apprise her father of its coming.

The church reminded one of the village churches in England, where the uniform style of architecture has come to have a sacred significance in itself—long and narrow, with slender pointed windows, a very steep roof, a white cross rising directly from the ridge at the front end of the church.



In a book of poems, *Linden Blossoms*, by the late Jeffrey Hrbek, first instructor in the Department of Bohemian at the University of Nebraska, this exquisite poem appears.

THE OLD CHURCH

Out of the dust and turmoil of the city street  
Into the sanctuary's restful cool I pass.  
Here no curious eye intrudes upon my acts,  
Here the soft light slants in through colored  
glass,

And the mould seems sweet to breathe.  
Here one can dream and think and muse,  
And gain once more courage to live the life  
Of the world—the really pleasant life  
Which to tired souls seems drudgery.  
How many an inspiration, gray old church,  
Has come to me from thine own unattractive  
self!

Doctrine has done its part to cheer the soul,  
But thou, the Building, hast been kinder still.  
As the old vine has learned to take good hold  
Upon the weatherbeaten masonry,  
So I have learned to cling in trust to God.  
I know not what he is excepting good;  
So much the vine knows also of your broad  
front wall.

If one structure in Peru more than  
another reflected the industry and enter-  
prise of the early days, it was this



*The Old  
Brick Church  
on the Hill*

strongly constructed church, built of native wood and brick, at a time when no one was rich, and no one was poor, and labor was freely contributed.

The brick was made from the excellent clay found on the north side of the hill where a brick yard was operated by a skillful young Missourian. This was near the beginning of the brick-making business, that was to continue in Peru during the forty years following, with this same hill as the source of the clay. As one comes into town from the depot today, he has not walked far, only two blocks perhaps, before he observes that the hillside at his right has been cut away. It is the old story of the earth yielding up her treasure, and man's transforming it to his use. The shapeless clay re-appears in the homes and school building on the hills of Peru.

During the two hot summer months, when the Nebraska farmer longs for rain and the brick-maker gives thanks for drought, the low, level part of Peru was the scene of steady toil. Teamsters were hauling the fine clay from the hill to the pit at the brickyard where the wooden mill, turned by the slowly trudging horse, ground up the moistened clay. The mill was nothing more

than a tall, narrow crib, made of rough boards, to hold the clay. Down through the center of the crib extended a beam with spokes projecting. With the turning of the spoked beam, the clay was evenly stirred and mixed and moistened. But childhood's memories of the old mill lift it far above the crude and commonplace contrivance that it was, and give it a charm not to be forgotten. For the unfettered and care-free youngsters, who idled away the summer days, life held no greater joy than loitering near the mill. Oh! the fun of scaling its slippery sides and peering down into the mysterious muddy workings of the machine! To us children it seemed for all the world like a huge coffee-mill. There was the corresponding opening near the bottom, through which the clay exuded. The long wooden arm creaked as the horse made his monotonous round, slackening his pace at every step.

At the open side of the mill there was a moulding shelf or table, and here, standing in a small pit, shaded by an

awning, the brick-moulder stood, the most responsible man concerned in the business. With sleeves rolled to the elbow and large apron fastened about him, he dexterously kneads the clay, and flings it into the three-sectioned mould. It is he who determines if the clay is wet enough, or if it contains obnoxious pebbles or grit, and it is he, who, with emphatic shouts and occasional flying clods, rouses the horse to resume its tiresome travel.

The old way of moulding brick by hand was interesting to see. It was one of those processes that look easy, and yet defy the person who tries his hand at it. If the clay is not firmly fitted into the mould, or if the mould is poorly sanded, the brick will come out minus a corner, or otherwise misshapen. When the clay was thrown into the wooden form—like so many loaves of bread—there was still the upper side to be trimmed off clean and smooth. This was done by drawing a wire swiftly across the top, shaving off the clay as if it were dough. The most expert

brick-moulder in Peru, who learned to ply the trade in the '60s and followed it for more than twenty years, was William Phelps. As the years went by, the brick yard swung around from the north to the east side of the hill, near Green's mill, and "Billy" swung around with it, too. Brick-making is no longer his business, but reminiscences of it are rife any day for the visitor who spends a pleasant hour with him, in his little shoe-shop at the end of the side street. He thinks he made more than a million brick himself, in Peru's thriving days of brickmaking, out of the identical hillside upon which this story centers, when, to quote his feeling reference to the past, he "worked for the best friend he ever had."\*

The boys who carried the brick were the "off-bears." They bore the moulds of brick from the moulding table to the drying grounds, and there turned the brick out upon the sanded floor. The ground was level as a billiard table, and the bricks lay in long straight lines, baking in the sun. As the summer days

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\*William Phelps passed to his reward in May, 1911.

progressed, the barefoot boys who labored as "off-bears" became strong in arms and back. The blisters on the heels and hands gave place to a skin of leatherette. Tan was a color much worn, the fashion books might have said. They acquired a swinging gait and a rhythmic bearing of the heavy mould, and daily the output of brick increased. Scores of men in Peru can cite the time when as boys they spent the summer months as "off-bears" in the brick-yard.

When the time came for building up the brick into a kiln for burning, yet another form of skill was required. Here the expert brick "setter" came into prominence, when arms and hands swung back and forth, catching and setting the brick in even rows, "one over two," allowing spaces for a good draught. Under the kiln arched openings were left for ovens, where logs burned day and night for about eight days. The fires must be steady, not too hot and not too low. If the work of firing is faithfully done, the kiln when burned will have a true proportion of pink, red,



and gray brick—the salmon color on the outside, farthest removed from the heat, the gray near the fire, and the beautiful cherry brick in the center, or heart, of the kiln.

Who has not had the pleasure of visiting a burning brickkiln at night! What small boy has missed the delightful experience of crouching low to look into the long glowing furnaces, when for an instant the iron doors were opened! Where is the youth who never cherished the ambition for once in his life to spend the night with the brick-burners?

When midnight approached and the crowd of curious stragglers all had dwindled away, when the proprietor was slumbering in his bed, then the night really set in for the brick-burners. The gray mist began to rise from the ground, and the dusty weeds grew heavy with dew after the long, hot August day. The lapping sound of the cottonwood leaves closely resembled rain. Occasionally a way-off plunging sound came up from the river. The air

pulsated with the buzzing of the locusts, the crickets rubbed their squeaky fiddles incessantly, defying the ear to locate the sound on the ground below or in the air above, and the unremitting trilling choruses of the frogs rose from the willows. It must have been on some such night that the plantation negro was inspired to sing "The Bull-frog am no Nightingale!" The genuine Peruvian has grown up with these sounds of the night. They are his drowsy slumber song. What now could stave off sleep for the weary brick-burners! If it was to be a feast, it must be a good one, something more substantial even than a luscious water-melon. The season of the year was at hand when spring chickens and sweet potatoes were ripe. These, coming from regions unknown, found their way to the top of the kiln, beside the boiling coffee-pot, there to sizzle and bake, a fragrant memory still for scores of Peruvians.

It is a faulty art that makes it necessary for a writer to explain the connec-

tion between the parts of his story. The power of suggestion is often a very subtle thing, and in this instance the digression all came about by one simple circumstance; namely, that the little hill-church, which I have chosen to call the Lost Landmark, was made of the finest quality of cherry brick. Cherry brick! The name sounds attractive, does it not?

On the north side of the hill, where excavations have exposed its structure, there is a vein of rich maroon clay, some six or eight feet below the surface, dipping to the north. I used to think that this red clay gave color and value to Peru brick, but the fact is, it is not desirable as brick-making material. Have you ever handled it, or cut it with your knife? It is very close, fine-textured, and carves like pipe-stone. The fact that it holds water and does not dry easily is not in its favor for brick-making; but there are properties which it possesses that might make Peru famous, possibilities for a high quality of terra cotta and pottery. It has been

successfully experimented with in the Art Department of the Normal School, where vases have been made that out-classed Teko in design of work. Its excellent firing qualities have been demonstrated, and samples sent East for examination have been highly spoken of. Some of the earliest settlers in Peru tell how they used to make paint of this red clay. As boys, they painted their small wagons red, and the crimson coating which they daubed on barns and fences remained a deep red for many years. These settlers state that a capitalist at one time contemplated building a paint factory here.

If we would picture our hill as it appeared in 1869, when the church was built, we must restore the north and east slopes. We must get away from the idea of its being a bluff, as we see it today. No grading had been done, and the east side of the hill was one long slope as far as Green's mill. Fifth street, extending over the ungraded hill, was a slippery climb in winter for

man and beast. The wagons slid and turned until they often came down the hill sidewise. Finally, some of the villagers, in desperation, united with horses and shovels, and cut away the crest of the hill—with an abundance of slope left, to be sure, for many years following. It was after the railroad came, in 1875, and the depot was built at the north end of Fifth street, that the vicissitudes of this hilly road increased. In rain or shine, in sleet or snow, there was one wagon that for several decades rumbled regularly over this road, on its errand to and from the depot. Perhaps it was not the same “identical” wagon that endured the years, but, to all appearances, the wagon, team and driver seemed unchanged, as they faithfully transported The United States Mail for the people of Peru. The wagon was without a seat, and the driver usually stood, or sometimes sat on the corner of the wagon-box. This vehicle, more than any other in the village, had a fascination for the children, who ran wildly after it for the joy of hanging

onto the end-gate, or clambered over the wheels while the indulgent old man stopped to let them in. That kind, bearded face, beneath the perennial fur cap, is stamped on the memory of every village child in lower Peru. The long-suffering man performed the function of day-nursery, so to speak, and no harm ever befell a child in the keeping of the old bachelor, clad in jeans and girt with a hempen cord. Beneath that rough exterior there beat a warm, true heart.

The ride to the depot was not without its sensational features for the hardy youngsters who sat in the wagon or swung from its end, expecially if there was a mad chase down the hill to catch the train that stood waiting on the track. The shaking up which the occupants received left a tingling sensation in every inch of their anatomy. Onlookers watched the outcome with bated breath—but “Peter” always won the day. Finally, however, the fates were less propitious for the old war-veteran, and several years ago in a run-away

near the depot, he sustained an injury, which resulted in the amputation of a limb, and his retirement to the National Soldier's Home. The wide-spread sympathy and interest on every hand betokened the distinct place that he held in the memory of every one who had ever been familiar with Peru, where he fitted, as it were, into the landscape of the old town. In the early days the newly arriving Normal School student—seldom rich and often poor, unsophisticated in the ways of travel—made as his first acquaintance this man, "Peter," for was it not he who hauled his trunk and baggage? And did not he soothingly say to the student, who fumbled for the change, that there was no hurry about the pay, which, by the way, amounted, all told, to the sum of ten cents. Men in high places today recall with gratitude this first business transaction in Peru, when going away to school meant for them working their way.

If, on every hill-top in Peru, there were erected a monument inscribed with its record of events, we should



read the annals of early days almost complete, for the hilltops were the scene of picturesque incidents year after year. In attempting to re-instate the experiences of early days through the recollections of pioneers, I find that not a few but many events transpired on the summits of the hills. To be sure there was not a Bunker Hill among them, but there might have been, had the occasion demanded. The Union sentiment was strong, and there were flag-raising and celebrations. In 1861, as nearly as old settlers can recall this particular event, Old Glory was raised on the hill where the church later stood. The flag-pole was a tall spliced sycamore, smooth and straight, and more than sixty feet high. Encamped on the hill at the time was a regiment of Nebraska soldiers. This flag-raising occurred more than fifty years ago, and yet the story was related to me by a man who witnessed it at the age of ten.

If I might have been permitted to enjoy any of Peru's real pioneer experiences, my choice of them all, I am sure,

would have been the Fourth of July celebrations, held on the hill-tops, under the sky's canopy. They have been the subject for some of the most delightful reminiscences, related to me by eyewitnesses, whose names I might mention with pride. It was in the very early sixties, on the aforesaid hill, that a rousing Fourth of July Celebration took place. There were no shade trees on the spot, so men and boys constructed a long arbor of boughs. They set up forked poles and laid willows across for a canopy. Under this fresh green covering of willows cut and carried from the riverside, a table, many feet long, was heaped with delicious things to eat. I have a burning curiosity to know what those eatables were, for, each time that this part of the story has been related to me, there has been a tone of voice and a use of superlatives convincing me that, in quantity and quality, this feast was memorable,—a compliment to the Peru housewives who prepared and served it. A large crowd assembled to celebrate, many of

the number being Missourians, who had crossed the river in flat-boats and skiffs. In fact, the speaker of the day, I am told, was a school teacher from Missouri. There was martial music on the fifes and drum from musicians who stood in a wagon that shifted its position to suit the crowd. Major Brush, a drummer in the Mexican War, and later a musician in the Civil War, beat the drum that day, the same instrument that had gone with him through the war in Mexico, and which is still in his possession.\* The fifiers trilled and whistled their lively tunes, until every boy was stepping to music. The spirit of Independence was there and the patriotic prelude to a great Civil War.

But the war was over, and the Boys in Blue, whose lives were spared, had returned to Peru when the subject of this sketch, from which we have so far digressed, was erected on the hill as an Episcopal house of worship. The two lots for its site were deeded to the church by Dr. J. F. Neal, and the timber was furnished largely by Thomas Green,

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\*Major J. W. Brush answered the last summons August, 1911, at the age of ninety-one.

while the labor was a contribution from townsmen generally. A lady member of Grace Church in Brooklyn Heights, New York, whose name is not recorded, contributed one thousand dollars to the enterprise, and the sum of five or six hundred dollars was raised in Peru through the strenuous efforts of two or three adherents of the Church of England, the church of their native land. This leaves the source of some money still unaccounted for, and it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Bishop Clarkson, a generous founder of hospitals and churches in his time, supplied something of this amount.\* In the church archives in Omaha there is a pamphlet, published in 1893, as the *Quarter-Centennial History of the Diocese of Nebraska*. A few statements from it will not be amiss at this juncture:

“Peru, in Nemaha County, on the river bank, away down almost in the extreme southeast corner of the state, was one of the earliest spots where the church planted her agencies for the

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\*The widow of Thomas Green informs us that her husband contributed this sum of money.

spiritual assistance of those passing through the 'Great American Desert' on their western way. Bishop Clarkson in his first report, in October, 1866, speaks of it as a station 'where services periodical or occasional are held by the bishop and clergy of the territory.' At the organization of the Diocese in September, 1868, we find St. Mary, Peru, ranked among the Parishes of the Diocese with five communicants and property valued at \$2,800. The Rev. Dr. Oliver laid the cornerstone of the church in 1868, and the building was completed and opened for use the following year. It was the first house of worship erected in the town.† In Bishop Clarkson's address to the Council of the Diocese that year he announced that the church was wholly paid for and ready for consecration, but it was never consecrated."

For thirty-five years this church stood a monument of pioneer labor, but alas! lacking in congregation and spiritual results. It was rather remarkable for its negative qualities, in-as-much as

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†The first Episcopal house of worship.

there never was a resident minister, never more than five communicants, and never a marriage or confirmation service performed within its walls.\* This melancholy commentary appears in the Quarter-Centennial History: "In Peru we had a few communicants, but they have removed or died, and there were none to rise up in their stead, and today there is not one left even to care for the protection of the building, itself the gravestone of the church there." One funeral occurred in St. Mary's Church, and — strangely co-incident — it was the burial service for Thomas Green, who, only ten years before, had been its chief donor, and whose name must appear in connection with every early enterprise in Peru.

Even if the church seemed to have failed in visible results, I love the building itself not a whit less—

"How many an inspiration, gray old church  
Has come to me from thine own unattractive  
self!"

The interior harmonized with the exterior in simplicity and harmonious

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\*The two children of Thomas and Mary Green were baptised in this church.

design. As one might expect after observing the long narrow building, it consisted only of the nave, or long middle aisle, with pews on either side. The distance from the entrance to the chancel seemed longer perhaps than it really was, on account of the high sharp-angled roof above it. The narrow Gothic windows let in the light through red glass and softened the glare of white plastered walls, the window above the altar being larger than the others. In this present day when hard wood is found chiefly in veneer, we cannot but have a heightened respect for the walnut pews, the reading desk and communion table. A moss green carpet extended down the middle of the church, and at the left of the chancel stood a small organ. When the bishop made his occasional visits to Peru, it is a commendable fact that a goodly number availed themselves of the opportunity of listening to this scholarly gentleman, although among the pioneers very few could engage in the formal part of the service, those few hav-



ing been reared in the faith, either in this country or in England. There came nearer being a responsive heartiness in the congregational singing of the grand old hymns, unassisted by a choir. As a matter of record, I wish I were able to tell where the organ was manufactured. Its volume was re-enforced by pumping, and well do the pioneers remember the stalwart German whose native sense of rhythm and faithfulness made him indispensable at this post. Only a few days ago this venerable citizen and I fell into a conversation about this old organ, and he remarked, "I think it must have leaked some, because it took so much pumping."

How vividly some of these services in the early eighties come back to mind! Once more I recall my childish wonderment at the congregational risings and sittings, my scrutiny of the bishop's robes and my curiosity to know their significance, and, chiefly, my reverence for the man himself, whose presence sometimes honored our home and table. But when I think of that comely Saxon

youth, the sweet-voiced singer, at the organ, whose slender fingers drew from the faded keys a response rich and reverent—then, indeed, does my pen falter, and my heart mourn for a voice that is gone. Those who knew the boy, William Gaede, my lamented kinsman, will not withhold this slight tribute to his memory. The purity of his soul shone in his countenance, and human hearts, old and young, responded to his influence for good that continues through the years, while his body rests in the shadow of the Celtic Cross on Mt. Vernon Hill.

For a while St. Mary's Church served as temporary quarters for three other denominations, and then followed the years of disuse and abuse that brought about its end. Never having been consecrated, the church was used also as a place for secular gatherings—political meetings, entertainments and a private school. But it was practically an untenanted building, and destruction began to make its inroads. The first to go was the window glass, shattered here and

punctured there in a way that suggested that the small boys in sling-shot season had been having target practice. How often in summer have I seen the birds coming and going through the opening in the altar window. In the Quarter-Centennial History, afore-mentioned, Rev. Canon Talbot is quoted as saying: "The old parochial register was destroyed by a lot of vandals who tore up all the books and papers found in church many years ago." Locks and bolts, storm-doors and windows seemed inadequate to withstand vandalism when once it began. One by one, the pieces of furniture disappeared; the organ had become the home of musically inclined mice, the little wooden cross on the gable, gray and old, leaned impendingly to the side, and finally disappeared. I have wondered what became of it, and whether it ever pointed any one to heaven. Were it mine, I should treasure it not only as a symbol of Our Lord Crucified, but of pioneer hopes and aspirations. I cannot believe that any one could construct

a cross and not be ennobled thereby.

There was no poet to rally together the friends of the first church in Peru, and rescue it from destruction as Holmes' "Old Iron Sides" saved the battleship *Constitution*. As an entity it was doomed to disappear. The building as it stood was sold in 1905 to the Christian Church organization of Peru, for the sum of fifty dollars, and the lots were sold for taxes. Then the dismantling of the structure began, and there was revealed a soundness and endurance that led me to venture the assertion made at the beginning of this sketch; namely, that the ruin gave promise of weathering a century of years and outliving its newest neighbors. The cottonwood timber was still well preserved, even in the floor. The shingles in the steep roof, undecayed by time, were removed with difficulty from the boards to which they were fastened with long nails. Scarcely a brick was wasted, the cherry brick facing being in excellent condition. The entire foundation of


the new Christian Church is made of this fine old structure. Even the stone steps—blocks of limestone from a quarry two miles west of Peru—were transferred to the new site, there to bear the footsteps of a younger generation seeking, as did the pioneers, to find God.

“Oh! there is not lost one of earth’s charms!  
Upon her bosom yet, after the flight of untold  
centuries,  
The freshness of her far beginning lies,  
And yet shall lie.”

*Iowa**Nebraska**Missouri*

## CHAPTER IV.

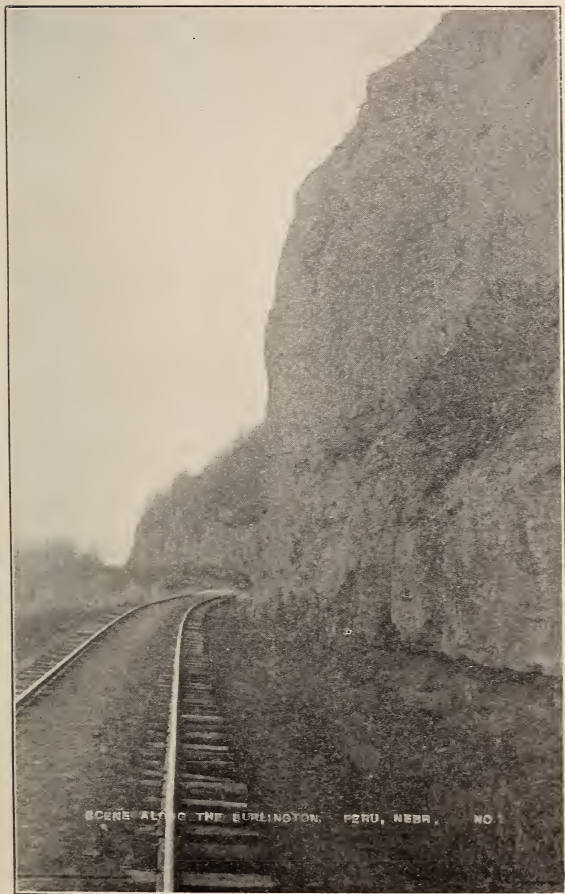
### THE MILL AND OTHER PIONEER PICTURES.

 NOWADAYS when railroads determine almost entirely the location of a town, there is very little of geographic influence associated with a town's situation. The place where it suits a railroad's convenience to end may be an unprepossessing spot for a town, but despite the unfitness of certain lasting natural conditions, it is there that a town will spring up, while perhaps a very few miles distant, an ideal townsite lies unused. As a railroad extends its course and pushes its terminus farther into the heart of a new country, the little towns that it leaves behind often fade away, unless some other factor has come in to give them a hold upon life. In pioneer days most of the permanent towns grew up because of distinct geographic influences. Pittsburgh the gateway to the Ohio valley, could not have become other than a

flourishing city; Cincinnati, on a great river-bend, marked the place for loading and unloading steamboats; Omaha began as a trading post, then a gateway to the Platte Valley trail, and a point where a bridge spanned the Missouri. However, it is not safe to conclude that even in those pioneer days the greatest natural advantages determined the location of the largest, richest cities. The early history of Nebraska reads like a romance in its record of the narrow margins by which one town achieved and another forfeited its future greatness. A single stroke of statesmanship, a moment's lethargy, gained or lost for a town a bridge, a stage line, a fort, a turnpike, a capital, or a railroad. Thus some of the early towns born great were destined to lose their birthright.

Peru had its reason for being long before the railroads reached it, and although but little more than a half century has elapsed since the date 1857 (when Peru was entered at the Brownville Land office), and but two generations have reached manhood since its





christening, those early scenes have already faded into the dim distance, and our youths of today are unaware of the deeds of their fathers. It is for their descendants, and not for the brave pioneers themselves, that this sketch is offered, in a feeble attempt to re-instate those early days. None too soon is it to seize upon these evidences of change before they slip away!

The landscape—the “eternal hills” and the trees—what changes have come over them! The trees tell their story of multiplied growth, while the hills in subdued outlines have lowered their summits and reduced their slopes under the influence of the rain and the plow. The large timber was near the streams, and the early settlers, who were used to living in a wooded country, chose these regions for homebuilding, rejecting at first the beautiful open prairies with soil so surpassingly fertile and easily won to the plow. Close to the river were the giant cottonwoods, the native elm, sycamore and oak, while the hills were overgrown with so-called brush

among which tiny oaks were springing up from seeds borne by the birds and the winds. Shade was not to be found on the hill-tops or prairies.

The young horticulturalist in Peru today might profitably interest himself in reckoning the age and noting the variety of trees that surround the homes in the village, and constitute the groves in the country-side. These have practically all grown up within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. An instance occurring only last summer impressed upon us the youthfulness of our trees. After fifty years of absence, a lady returned to Peru. In the hope of obtaining an expansive view of the town, as she had been wont to do in her childhood, she stood once more at the door of her old home (located opposite the old M. E. Church). It was then that she realized that the town's new dress of shade trees had changed it beyond recognition, and hidden from view its slopes and valleys.

All within the memory of the first settlers, cottonwoods have been planted.

have grown to lofty heights, been cut down and supplanted by hardwoods, which in turn have become ample shade trees. The handsome row of walnut trees on Dr. J. F. Neal's farm, along the road that leads into Peru from the south was started from the seed fifty years ago. On the State Normal campus a large red oak (*Quercus Texana*) which was cut down at the south-east corner of the Administration building (April, 1911) told in rings of growth the age of forty-two years. It measured six feet in circumference and about fifty feet in height. It was one of the oldest trees on the campus, and yet the acorn from which this veteran sprang had not been formed when the Normal School was established in '67. Two oaks near the south end of Science Hall are possibly older by a decade. The thick stand of oaks and elms on the beautiful slope east of the Main building are of a younger growth, the older trees having been cut out some twenty years ago. A shapely Lombardy poplar, cut down on the private property north of Science



*"The  
Oaks"*

Hall showed a growth of twenty-five years. It is said that trees are the oldest living things in America. Trees with six thousand years of growth, with gigantic branches before Columbus discovered the new world, are far removed from the experience of the prairie pioneer.

Remembering that Peru began at the river's edge, round about the old boat-landing, we find the saw-mills the scene of its chief activity. Not only along the river, but upon the adjacent islands were mills busily turning the timber into lumber, shingles and logs. Upon

Sonora Island two mills operated, and the trees which we see there today are all a new growth. Old settlers in Peru tell of their experiences upon McKissick's Island, above the village, when they found employment some fifty years ago in one of the large sawmills there. The mention of McKissick's Island reminds us of the fact that this land was not always the complete island that it is today. It is true that a slough, or shallow stretch of water, lay between it and the mainland, but a more complete separation was yet to come. The river swung in a great bend around the island, which served as a protective barrier to the lands on the west. But finally in '67, the old Missouri, grown tired of the sixteen miles detour, cut through a narrow neck some ninety rods across, in a single night, and sent a swift current rushing and plunging through the new channel. Having wedged itself in at this point, the river began its career of vast encroachments upon the bottom lands. Farms were engulfed one after the other, and early



settlers attest to the fact that they have seen as many as a thousand acres of their best land go into the river in twenty-four hours. We have reason to believe that the old river was repeating its history, because, far below the surface of the land buried logs of vast dimensions protruded into the water. This evidence is further corroborated by the experience of farmers on the bottom lands, who in digging their wells have struck huge logs some fifteen feet below the surface.

A stern-wheeler steamboat, the "Bishop," Captain Overton in command, in '67, went down in the strong waters of the new channel. It was loaded with gunny sacks of corn from Hamburg for the government. The wreck was later bought by Samuel Pettit, and stripped of its machinery and lumber down to the hull. (The companion-way in this ill-starred boat has served as a stairway in the home of Daniel Cole for forty years).

The saw-mill and the grist-mill, even before the settlement was incorporated



—these two factors determined the location of Peru. Of them all, Green's mill, standing near the east end of old Main street, is the only survivor, a finely preserved land-mark of river days. The river front is now dry land. The small stores, the ware-houses, the saw-mills and the boat-landing are in the river. The wood-yards no longer invite the passing boat to stop for fuel, as in the days when the cords of cottonwood in long lines lay on the shore, when "cottonwood script was legal tender." If the owner of the wood was not on hand when the steamboat



*An "Old  
Settler"*

arrived, the crew measured the wood and loaded it on board. The boat-clerk might leave a note telling the owner where he could call for his money, and as far as we have learned no money was ever lost. To be sure, sometimes the cords of irregular poles and slabs were piled rather loosely, as a steamboat clerk remarked upon one occasion after measuring the pile, "A good deal of air in that wood!" No more may the passer-by see the gunny sacks of corn piled high along the river waiting in wind and weather for the steamboat. Sometimes the boat provided a tarpaulin, and the corn was not wholly unprotected. A thousand bushels belonging to Abner Carlisle, and five thousand bushels to Harmon Ray endured in the early days a spell of continued rains, when the sprouts began bursting through the sacks. Reports vary as to the price Mr. Ray received for his corn in St. Louis, but the amount was evidently not entered on the credit side of the books.

The history of Green's mill is the his-

tory of old Peru in a nut-shell. Erected in 1862 by Thomas Green, it became the most ambitious center of industry for many miles around. It was built of strong yellow cottonwood, when large trees were plentiful and lumber was not more than ten dollars per thousand. The fine large posts in the center of the building were hewn from the heart of the tree. Like the "good old days" these giant yellow cottonwoods are gone. The lumber was cut at Green's saw mill on the Missouri side of the river, on land that has since disappeared, and hauled across on the ice. The machinery was planned by a millwright, who had learned his trade in England, and his exactness was a marvel to the pioneers. For one year Daniel Cole worked beside him, a pioneer loyal to early memories. Many parts of the machinery were made of wood instead of steel. The wooden shafts, reels, and spiral conveyor were all made by hand. No turning-lathe was then in use. The shafts were made of the heart of sycamore trees. The modern student of

manual training might well observe the mortise-joints, dove-tailing and wooden pins. The building is still true and plumb. When completed with its four new patent flour bolts the mill cost the builder seventeen thousand dollars. It was operated by steam, and there were three sets of mill-stones. Green's flour was unexcelled in this section of the country. Men were constantly employed in hauling the fuel from McKissick's Island to the mill.

Before the present building was erected, there had gone into the river on the east a grist mill, a large saw-mill, a log and lumber yard belonging to Green and Baker. The machinery in the sawmill was barely rescued by the proprietors before the land on which it stood sank. This machinery was later installed on the Missouri side of the river, while the grist mill was moved to its present location. In connection with this commercial period in Peru, the names of three men who came from Indiana in 1857 were destined to stand out in large letters—Hon. Samuel Daily,

congressman, who brought with him from Indiana the machinery for a saw-mill; Major Baker, Indian agent at the Otoe Reservation; and "Tom" Green, capitalist, who dared to risk his all in frontier enterprises that gave the thrill of life to the pioneer business world.

The steamboats brought grain to the mill from Otoe City (Minersville), Brownville and St. Deroin. Farmers for many miles around brought their grain to the mill to be ground into flour. Indian bands came from their reservation on the Blue, and after camping for the night on the slough north of the village, loaded their little ponies to the limit of endurance with four or five sacks of flour (ninety-six pounds in a sack). Mr. Green had the government contract to supply the Indians with flour in parts of the upper river reservations. Then there were the ponderous freighters, bound for the Pike's Peak country. The double yoke of oxen seemed scarcely to move with the great loads of flour.

Those were exceedingly busy days,

but they were merry ones, too, for are they not "the good old days?" On the Fourth of July, in '62, the mill rang with the shouts of the dancers. Its completion was thus celebrated by the village folk, who scraped and bowed to the irresistible tunes of the "fiddlers three."

For forty years the mill has ceased to operate. The machinery was sold to various buyers, and the building came into the possession of H. M. Mears, a Peru merchant. For twenty years the lower stories were used as ware-rooms, while the upper floor bore the proud title of the Peru Opera House, where itinerant players thrilled young Peruvians with their productions of Kathleen Mavourneen and Uncle Tom's Cabin, for the small admission fee of ten cents. Since '98 the old mill has been used as a warehouse for lumber, and is at present the property of the Meek Lumber Company.

## CHAPTER V.

THE PIONEER—WHENCE AND WHITHER.



PEOPLE may be tracked by the geographic names which they give to the regions which they occupy. The names of their children and their towns perpetuate their history. Peru was no exception to the rule, named as it was by a company of emigrants from Peru, Illinois, pioneers who saw fit to spend their lives and end their days in the town of their founding, or on the beautiful farms adjoining. The names of the sturdy population transplanted from the prairies of Illinois to the prairies of Nebraska cannot be enumerated at this time, but a historian of Peru may not delve far into the early family alliances and neighborhood notes without knowing of the Medleys, the Swans, the Horns, the Halls, the McKenneys, the Combses, and the Tates, and today the stranger, sauntering in beautiful Mt. Vernon Cemetery, sees their names



again and again on the headstones. The small vanguard that arrived in Peru expressed their satisfaction in their letters sent back to the home folks. Not that any appeal or inducement was held out; often only the slenderest thread of suggestion was sufficient to draw a friend or relative, who was already looking longingly westward, to the Missouri river country. Some of these emigrants had themselves been Illinois pioneers, and the migratory instinct was strong in them and in their children, even so much so that some, grown old in Peru, desired yet a third time to go west, and take a share in new lands.

By boat, by train, and with ox-teams they came, these migrating people. There was Thomas Williams, who came to Peru from Illinois in 1859, having made a nine days' trip down the Mississippi and then journeyed by train to Hannibal, Missouri, where he boarded the boat which brought him to Peru. Little Illinois Tate (Mrs. Charles Neal) when but a child of four years, rode behind an ox-team all the way from her

native state, whose name she bore, to Peru. Others made the whole trip from Peru, Illinois, by boat, going down the Illinois and Mississippi, and there taking a Missouri river steamer. The mention of "Bureau County," Illinois, has a familiar sound to many a Peru pioneer. For years the population of Peru all seemed related one to the other, and only of late are we ceasing to hear from old and young, the kindly expressions, "Aunt Lucinda," "Uncle John," and "Aunt Polly."

In a number of instances we find that Peru received some of her best settlers by the merest chance, as when a family, enroute to Kansas, crossed the river here, and finding satisfied friends and fertile lands, changed their original plans, and ventured no farther toward "bleeding Kansas." Like the scriptural shepherd patriarchs they had gone forth to choose instinctively from out the great domain such lands as to them seemed good for their flocks and herds.

The kindred experiences of the prairie states is set forth by Allen White, when

he says of the Missouri boy who played in the road, "The movers' wagon was never absent from the boy's picture of that time and place. Either the canvas covered wagon was coming from the ford of Sycamore Creek, or disappearing over the hill beyond the town, or was passing in front of the boys as they stopped their play. Being a boy, he could not know, nor would he care if he did know, that he was seeing one of God's miracles—the migration of a people, blind but instinctive as that of birds or buffalo, from old pastures into new ones. All over the plains in those days, on a hundred roads like that which ran through Sycamore Ridge, men and women were moving from east to west, and, as often has happened since the beginning of time, when men have migrated, a great ethical principle was stirring in them."

The staid agricultural community might have lacked color had there been no soldiers of fortune, no adventurers to enliven the scene. We must not forget that Peru was founded but

a few months before the gold strike in the Pike's Peak country, which occurred in 1858, and it is to this co-incident that she owes some of her most virile citizens who fell to her lot in the rush to and from the gold fields, citizens with talent and business acumen. Some had been to Pike's Peak and returned disillusioned; others had come across the Missouri, and hearing discouraging reports, determined to proceed no further, but to locate in the busy village of Peru; while a fortunate few brought back the gold dust that had lured them across the plains. Of the last class mentioned, the story is told of one fortune-seeker who returned carrying his booty in a goose-quill—two and one-half dollars in gold dust, in the getting of which he had expended seven hundred dollars.

In Root and Connelley's book, "The Overland Stage to California," we read: "It was the universal remark that nearly all who went out on the plains in the later '50s, and early '60s, had gone to Pike's Peak. Thousands of men attracted by the glowing reports of vast

quantities of gold at the new mines, fitted out at the prominent Missouri river towns—Kansas City, Leavenworth, Atchison, St. Joseph, Nebraska City, and Omaha—and started for the new ‘diggings.’ Nearly all the roads that led over the prairies and on the plains united at or near Fort Kearney, and from that point west the great overland military thoroughfare along the south bank of the Platte was lined with a busy, moving throng of people, representing a score or more of states, having in their charge various descriptions of vehicles. It was not long, however, until large numbers, thoroughly disgusted with the situation, began to return. Some backed out before they had gone one hundred miles from the Missouri river. Some turned back when within a few miles of Denver. The most of them on reaching their destination, became wiser and poorer, disappointed in not being able to pick up gold nuggets at every step. Comparatively few dared venture across in the winter, but in the spring of 1859

the immense rush began, and for months the road across the plains was fairly lined with white-covered wagons—nine out of ten of the people accompanying them destined for the new ‘Pike’s Peak mines.’ Those in search of the precious stuff went across in all kinds of vehicles, not a few pushing their effects in hand-carts and wheel-barrows. Quite a number started out with packs on their backs. It was plain that the ‘fever’ was raging at its highest.”

Among those men who felt that Peru would bring them gold more surely than would the Pike’s Peak country, and who pressed no further westward, was Dr. John F. Neal, an educated young physician, who came from Libertyville, Iowa, in 1859, whose valuable services the village and the whole country-side relied upon for forty years. For “chills-and-fever” he knew a remedy, and the poor as well as the prosperous received attention from his willing hands. Every villager holds in his childhood memory the picture of the large, kindly country doctor, who lived upon his broad acres

adjoining Peru. His drives through the town, and his resounding "good-morning!" never failed to attract the attention of the villagers, and arouse a curiosity to know his destination. Occasionally some village dame, with inquisitiveness irresistible, ran from her gate, and boldly brought his nag to a standstill, while she inquired "Who is sick out this way?" or "Have you got any hopes for Uncle Abner this morning?" The circumspect answers of the dignified doctor served in part, at least, to relieve the inquirer and on-lookers of their suspense.

While we would not be one of those who mourn for the "good old days," yet we cannot but wonder what there is to take the place nowadays of those early experiences, to stimulate a young man's mettle and train his muscle. I listened one day with wrapt interest to the recollections of a Peru pioneer, and, involuntarily, I contrasted his early training-school with that of the present, when, smilingly he said, "Yes, I went part way to the Pike's Peak



country but I came back disgusted. I got throughly sickened with the wild cattle. Our outfit was the usual train of twenty-six freight wagons, with five yoke of oxen, and one driver for each wagon. At night the big freighters were placed in two semi-circles, joined by chains, with the center as a corral. The cattle were turned loose to graze at night, tended by the night herder. Every morning those long-horned wild oxen were driven into the corral, and there was the torment of yoking them. With our wagons, each carrying from five to seven thousand pounds of freight, we covered ten or twelve miles a day, and we were never out of sight of a train on the road. The wide 'steam-wagon road' (leading west from Nebraska City) was worn down a foot by constant travel, and on either side, as far as the eye could see, the grass had been eaten off by passing cattle that thrived well on the prairie grass. You may know we went slowly, for the round-trip from Nebraska City to Denver consumed three months. The

event in the life of the 'bull-whackers' was the passing of the overland stage. The freighters, who used slowly to trudge along the way up the Platte valley, driving from four to six yoke of patient oxen, every day watched eagerly for the old stage. They looked upon the four-horse and six-horse overland coach as a vehicle distanced only by the lightning express train."

The death of Lieutenant Governor Hopewell in May, 1911, brought forth from the press of Nebraska biographical sketches of a remarkable pioneer career, that portrayed the development of the West. The novelist of the future will find his material for a stirring story of this section of the country in such a life of action. From Indiana to Texas, from Texas to Missouri, from Missouri to Nebraska—in the army and on the plains, and withal, the attainment of a college education. I quote this statement to call to mind a young man's employment in the 60's: "He then became a steamboat-hand on the Missouri, between St. Joseph and Omaha,

and later became a 'bullwhacker,' driving six yokes of oxen for a government freighting outfit from Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, to Fort Laramie, Wyoming."

While Peru was not on the main line of the Oregon Trail, there are features in its landscape that point the traveler westward. Let me remind my readers of the ancient anecdote of Mahomet, which one of Peru's hills suggests. He made his followers believe that he could call a hill to him, and when he called again and again and the hill stood still, he not a whit abashed, said, "If the hill will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the hill." Now, the dauntless pioneers of Peru, sometime in the dim past, outdid the bold prophet. They called the coveted hill, and it came—"Pike's Peak" by name.

One does not need to go very far from Peru to find one of the old freight roads. What Peru school-boy today can tell where the cumbersome wagons used to pass on their long tedious journey from the south to Nebraska City, and west-

ward? Let him call to mind the long ridge four or five miles west of Peru, which is what its name would indicate, "Highland." He may follow this ridge for many miles northward and southward. Like the Mohawk ridge in New York, it was the beaten trail for the Indians, keeping well out of the ravines and up from the lowlands. Then followed the days when it was widened into a wagon road, and today some of our best traveled roads follow it. Highland Church stands upon it. It is a divide for at least three water systems that we know—Buck Creek, Honey Creek, and the Nemaha. Any pioneer grandfather living among the hills of Peru can tell you across what farms the road ran, and perchance he himself drove one of the freight wagons, hauling corn to the forts in the Platte country, or flour to Denver. Perhaps he was one of those teamsters who drew the flour from Green's mill, driving his oxen at a snail's pace as they pulled their thousand pounds of freight from the hollows onto the highland that led to the 'steam-

wagon road. One old settler whose farm lies west of Peru says he saw such loads passing by, when the oxen made five miles of the steep hill country in two days. Another pioneer had a country smithy upon this ridge, and made iron shoes for the oxen and horses of the freighters.

The Peru pioneers early realized the importance of transportation facilities. They took advantage of future prospects to advertise the town where they could; to witness, the following from the catalogue of the Peru Nebraska State Normal School, 1872-3, printed at Brownville by the *Advertiser*:

“A daily line of stages runs between Peru and Nebraska City, Brownville and Watson, Missouri, connecting with the K. C., St. Jo. & C. B. R. R. at Watson, and the Mo. P. R. R. at Nebraska City. It is expected that the B. & Ft. K. R. R., running within one mile of the school, and the Trunk R. R., running through the village, will be completed this year, making the school accessible by rail from most parts

of the state." The abbreviations are given unexpanded as they appear in the original. "B. & Ft. K. R. R." represented the Brownville and Fort Kearney railroad, which the people of Brownville have reason to remember. The remnants of the abandoned railroad-bed still appear here and there in a grade along Honey creek, south of Peru. Considerable has been written concerning this incident in Nebraska's history.

Honey Creek is a stream that enters into Peru history from the beginning of the settlement. Some of the very first settlers took up their homesteads along



*East Slope  
Normal  
Campus*

the wooded stream, which finds its way into the Missouri River at a place now called Woodsiding, near the Walnut Grove schoolhouse and the Peru Coal mine. The creek itself is nowhere large, but its numerous tributaries head in springs, and the Honey Creek system drains many miles of farm land south of Peru.

Along its course among the hills on the south, the growth of timber is dense, and there are spots that have the overgrown appearance of a country never opened to settlement. Here the young naturalist may enjoy rare wild plant life and observe shy birds in profusion. One of the sources of Honey Creek is found in a deep cool spring that has long supplied the water for cattle on Edward Lash's farm, six miles southeast of Peru. Another such spring is on a farm owned by William Daily, and still another tributary has its beginning in a spring on Dr. J. F. Neal's farm adjoining Peru. The earliest settlers tell us that Honey Creek received its



name because of the many swarms of wild bees that were found there.


This sketch would hardly be complete without mention of Mt. Vernon. This euphonious and appropriate name has attached itself to the environs of Peru, appearing in the name *Mt. Vernon Cemetery*. The name antedates that of Peru, by a few months. A townsite company surveyed and platted a town called Mt. Vernon, on a piece of land adjoining Peru on the south-east. "Mt. Vernon obtained the post office, but after a feeble attempt to make a town, the attempt was abandoned, and Peru obtained the post office and soon made a thrifty growth."



*Delzel  
Oak*

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN INDIAN STORY.

N my quest for pioneer history, I have come upon an Indian story that has awakened in me the old fascination of the blood-curdling tales that our grandfathers and grandmothers used to relate, as they lived over again their frontier days with the Indians. It is perhaps an improvement over the past that the children of the household are less often entertained nowadays by the stories of Indian tragedies, stories that used to make the waking and dreaming hours of the night terrifying with visions of dusky, stealthy savages.

Truly, Silvia Hall, known to Peruvians as "Grandma Horn," was a woman of heroic mould, when after passing through the horrors of an Indian massacre in Illinois, she dared to come yet farther west into the heart of the Indian country. She and her brothers and sisters, were living with their par-

ents in a tiny settlement on Indian Creek, some fifteen miles north of Ottawa, Illinois, in 1832, when the last Indian outrage in that state occurred, on the afternoon of Monday, May 21st. It was at the time when Black Hawk, the noted Indian Chief, was at war with the whites, and the Illinois Volunteers under Major Stillman, were chasing him into Wisconsin. Abraham Lincoln was one of the captains under Stillman's command. The battle of Stillman's Run gave an overwhelming victory to the Sacs Indians, and they sent war parties all over the country.

In this story there also appears the proverbial "friendly Indian." Shabbona, a friendly chief of the Pottawattamies, performed a herioc deed for the whites. "Leaving his home where Paw Paw, Illinois, now stands, he rode for two hundred miles, warning all whites to flee to the nearest forts for protection. He was an elderly and fleshy man, and riding day and night, he killed his pony and utterly exhausted himself in his noble attempt to save the whites.'

The little settlement on Indian Creek received the warning and fled for refuge to Fort Ottawa,—all but one, a doubting Thomas, named William Davis, an Indian hater, who scorned the warning and refused to flee. For several days all things seemed quiet, no Indians were seen, and Davis persuaded several families, among them the Halls, to return to the settlement. But it was only the lull that precedes the storm! Almost all of the men were in the field planting corn not far from the houses. The remainder of the colony were at the home of Mr. Davis, which stood close to the creek. Suddenly an Indian's head appeared above the bank of the creek! It was Ke-was-see, seeking vengeance upon Davis, who had struck him for a trivial cause a short time before. Behind him there followed a band of howling savages. The alarmed settlers had no time to resist, and one after another was slain. The first to go were a Mr. Pettigrew and his wife. Then some of the children were shot, while others were taken by the heels

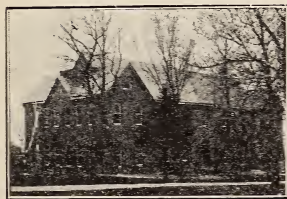
and their brains dashed out on trees and stones. Mrs. Hall, ill in her bed, Mr. Hall and two children were killed. One brother escaped by jumping down the river-bank and hiding in the thicket, while still another brother and the men in the field reached the fort at Ottawa.

As to the heroine of this sketch, Silvia Hall, and her sister Rachel, aged respectively sixteen and eighteen years, they were taken prisoners by the Indians, carried a mile or more up the creek to where the ponies were tied, and each girl was placed on a pony, the whole party then starting toward the northwest. They traveled until late at night, when a two hours' rest was taken and then the weary ride was resumed until the afternoon of the next day, when another halt was made, and the first meal, of beans and acorns, eaten. That night they came to wigwams, and here they paused for a pow-wow. "The girls were forced to sit on blankets, with one-half of their faces painted black and the other half red, while

their captors gave the scalp dance, brandishing in the girls' faces the scalps of their father, mother and sister." From the talk of the Indians, Sylvia understood the plan to be to kill her, but to take her more prepossessing sister Rachel for an Indian's squaw. The ride continued for seven days more, under the guard of squaws, and then the girls were given over to the Winnebagoes. Here their freedom was finally secured through the Indian agent at Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, and they were returned to their brother, who had gone in pursuit of them. Upon the spot of the massacre, Rachel Hall Munson afterwards erected a monument with the names of those massacred inscribed upon it.

Such then was the past of one of Peru's pioneer women. She was diminutive in stature, and retiring in disposition. She seldom alluded to the sad past. In 1856 she came to Peru as the wife of William S. Horn, a Protestant Methodist minister. He it was whom history credits with preaching

the first sermon in Peru precinct. They settled upon the homestead one-half mile south of Peru, known later as the McAdams place. At the age of eighty-five Mrs. Horn died, and her obituary brought to mind once more what pioneer experiences stood for, as typified in the life of this one woman, who had been born of pioneer parents, and faced frontier conditions in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Nebraska.





## CHAPTER VII.

### SUNBONNET DAYS.



ARE YOU the sort of person that enjoys finding your way through devious paths and overgrown trails, or would you steer entirely clear of roads and pathways and cut across country to spy out some untrodden way for yourself? If so, then you are a person of my own kind. Then we two would have been congenial pioneer rovers. Perhaps it is an instinct that harks back to our pioneer ancestors to love roads that are not much more than bridle paths, to stop at will and gather hazel-nuts in the dense brushy undergrowths, breaking our way through bushes everywhere, sending the birds fluttering from their thicket retreats, stumbling over twisted grape-vines and tangled morning glories sentineled by the scarlet sumach.

“Mr. Sumach sparkles where above the vines  
    he stands  
With seven lighted candles and a gold sconce  
    in his hands!  
Mr. Sumach sparkles in his livery of the light—  
But across the far-off valleys  
Sister summer sings good night!

Mr. Sumach’s glowing where the old fields lie  
    at rest,  
A blaze of carmine glory on the red glow of his  
    breast!  
Mr. Sumach’s glowing  
    In the last glow of the year,  
Ere the sweet smile of the summer  
    Turns her memory to a tear!”

Could we but have been one of the  
sunbonnet brigade that went a plum-  
ming with our pioneer grandmothers!  
We should have started out betimes in  
the morning, a troupe of husky children,  
with bags and baskets, for Honey Creek  
or Buck Creek to gather the large, yellow  
wild plums. Our grandmothers availed  
themselves of every kind of wild fruit,  
which according to their testimony,  
was better in those days than it is today.  
The plums were thin-skinned and meaty,  
and often the ground was carpeted with

yellow and red fruit. The grape-vines that climbed the bushes and trees, hung heavy with wild grapes, the summer variety as large as our Concords today, and the winter grape small and delicious in October after the first frost. Without stint the good mothers prepared the fruit for winter use. In the large brass kettles they cooked two and three gallons of preserves at once, and put it away in stone jars unsealed. The grapes were packed in sugar, layer upon layer. The plums were scalded and set away in barrels. The wild mulberry, found in such abundance on the islands, and the wild crab-apple were dried for winter pies. The dried elderberries might be cooked with the grapes, or used for tea or wine. Wild gooseberries, without thorns, were gathered also, nor were the haw-berries overlooked. Occasionally a peach or an apple-wagon came over from Missouri. The children ran into the road at the welcome sight of the apples bobbing on a stick.

Now let the "company" arrive in arge numbers, unannounced, driving

long distances to stay over Sunday and attend church! Beside the abundant food supply in the cellar, there was also hearty hospitality in the hearts. Quails and prairie chickens were easily obtained for meat. The river abounded in large cat-fish, the weight of which the modern chronicler dare not tell for fear of jeopardizing the veracity of the pioneers. And then there was the venison! Indeed, it was not uncommon for the deer to graze with the cattle. The boy who went after the cows in the evening would see the deer scampering away. Often from the rafters of the early settlers' homes there hung the heavy smoked venison hams.

In those pioneer days the mothers knew the necessity of storing the chests and cupboards with medicinal herbs. The herb teas of sage, spearmint, catnip, sassafras and pennyroyal all had their season and occasion for administration. Every child to reach maturity normally must undergo the course of herb concoctions.

We must remember that for some

time the country around Peru was unfenced. The cattle roamed at will irrespective of ownership. The roads did not turn at right angles; for example, on the bottom-lands north of Peru there were roads running diagonally from the bluffs to the river. The tall grass reached the head of the pedestrian, the deer flitted across his path, and coveys of quails rose almost within reach.

The pioneer period of Peru is not remote in the true sense of the word, and yet many household customs have never entered the experience of the last generation of children. What girl of today has seen her mother moulding tallow candles? And yet, but one generation back, and our mothers saw kerosene lamps come into use to take the place of the candle and the "grease-lamp." A Peru housewife was recalling the time when she saw her first lamp, which came from Brownville in the '60s. Well do I remember hearing a Peru farmer say, "No kerosene lamps for us! They're too dangerous. We

use candles, and they can't explode."

What lad of today slumbers in a trundle-bed? The mention of this space-saving couch recalls old-time memories for those who were boys a generation ago. When sleeping apartments were scarce, the children's trundle-bed was rolled under the high-posted "roped-bed" for the day, and there concealed by the bright chintz bed-founce. Any child would enjoy hearing the story, as I heard it, of a pioneer brother and sister, who were left alone in the house one night, and in their fright they managed to crawl into the trundle-bed under the large one and spend the night there.

In a very old collection of songs, I came upon the familiar time-worn tune, "The Trundle-Bed Song."

"Tho the house was held by strangers,  
All remained the same within,  
Just as when a child I rambled  
Up and down, and out and in.  
To the garret dark ascending,  
Once a source of childish dread,  
Peering through the misty cobwebs,  
Lo! I saw my trundle-bed."

In the beautiful valley in Peru there resides an aged lady whose venerated life has almost spanned a century. Could we but procure the memoirs of the life of Grandma Majors, we should indeed possess a history of a woman's part in the pioneer period. We have come to realize that biography is the basis of all historical structures. "The chronicles of the nations are composed of the sayings and doings of their men and women."

Not every pioneer was so fortunate as to be able to tread daily upon a fine rag carpet, which rebounded at every step from the thick straw filling that was spread beneath it. Very nearly every carpet ever woven in Peru was made by a little woman who came to the village at such an early date that her house is counted the oldest dwelling remaining in Peru. It was she who wove the rag-carpet for all the homes, and unfolded to the school children, who loitered by her loom, the mysteries of the "hit and miss" and the gorgeous "stripe." Her weaving came to an end in rather an




unusual way, as she related to me one spring day when seated in her garden. "I promised myself if Cleveland was elected that I would never weave any more, and I kept my promise," she said.

Where is the dear old pink-cheeked wax doll, whose perishable beauty was beset by the baby's fingers, the crackling cold of winter and the melting heat of summer! And what has become of the bright slatted sunbonnets, with cape and frill to cover half the back! And the Shaker-bonnet like the top of a mover's wagon! In their recesses the face of the modest pioneer woman was hidden away. From the sight and sound of the world they were indeed a secure retreat. Like the morning-glory that shaded our porches with gay purple and pink blossoms, the bright slatted sunbonnet is now but a radiant memory.



## CHAPTER VIII.

1870—1911.

 ON THE morning of May 29, 1911, there was dedicated in Peru a monument to mark the site of the first commencement exercises of the Nebraska State Normal School. The beautiful campus was the scene of a gathering of pioneers and students. The first president of the school and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. J. M. McKenzie, stood once more upon the ground where they had stood forty-one years before, and viewed the work which their hands had begun. A member of the first graduating class and two members of the first State Board of Education were present. Music composed for the first commencement was re-sung upon this occasion, and the gentleman who presided over the exercises was the first president of the Philomathean Literary Society in 1868.

This dedicatory exercise marked the

occasion of the first commencement in any higher institution of learning in Nebraska. At the close of the program a glacial boulder was presented to the school, with the following comments by the author:

Some dreams are only dreams, but some are realized. Only those who dream dreams and see visions ever move the world. The first commencement, which took place upon this campus, must have been attempted in its simple beginnings because two or three people could dream dreams, and could see far beyond the small group of earnest souls gathered together upon the shadeless prairies to something vastly more real and imposing. Whether they reared in their imagination a picture of acorns grown into giant trees and piles of brick and stone, we do not know, but one thing is certain—"a great ethical principle was stirring" in the minds of two or three people.

Allen White in his recent great novel



says, "The pioneers do not always go to the wilderness in lust of land. They sometimes go to satisfy their souls."

There are beginnings and beginnings of great movements among men. Some only are holy. The greatest endowment that any institution may know is a beginning that is a consecrated holy conception. That the Peru State Normal had such a beginning should be a source of unending joy to its students. What is an endowment in money or in worldly wealth for a school as compared with unselfish idealistic motives that breathe into an institution, as it were, the "breath of life!"

When men reach old age, they become introspective. They live largely in the past, and to them the far-away days are more vivid than the near-by present. Communities are like men whose rich ripe years bring them the leisure to look about and review the past. It is not strange, then, that in the southeastern corner of Nebraska, where the state has begun to enjoy comparative old age, that men and organizations

have begun to reflect upon the past, and to say, "This happened here," and "This happened here." Human nature has a weakness for glorying in primal distinctions and superlatives. Where the Pilgrims *first* landed is as sacred to Americans as a shrine.

We people of the middle-west have long looked to the East for a true appreciation of things historic. The awakening to our own historic significance has been slow, but at last it has reached Nebraska. Upon this spot today the Philomathean Society marks a founda-



*Glacial  
Boulder*

tion stone of the nation, for is not education the corner-stone of a republic!

This glacial boulder was found, a solitary, stranded, granite block, a few miles southwest of Peru. With considerable difficulty it was brought to this spot, to mark the site of the first commencement, held here in 1870. We hope before many days, through the efforts of Alumni Philomatheans, to have an appropriately inscribed bronze tablet placed upon it. The boulder now becomes the property of the Peru State Normal School. In days gone by, the east has contributed to Nebraska its culture, the south its chivalry, and in ages preceding, the far north contributed its glacial boulder. It is the hope of the Philomathean Society that here the stone may remain unmoved, at least until another Ice Age, in commemoration of the first commencement and the first Literary Society in a Nebraska higher institution of learning.

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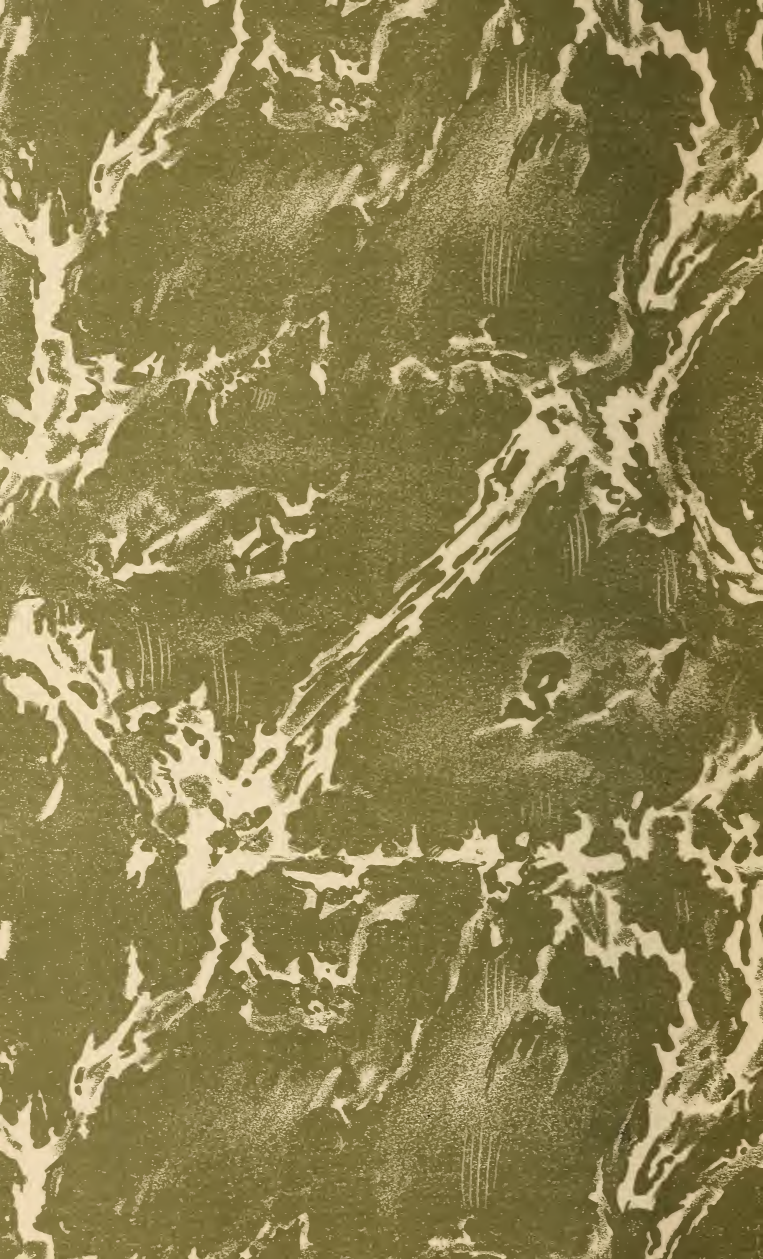
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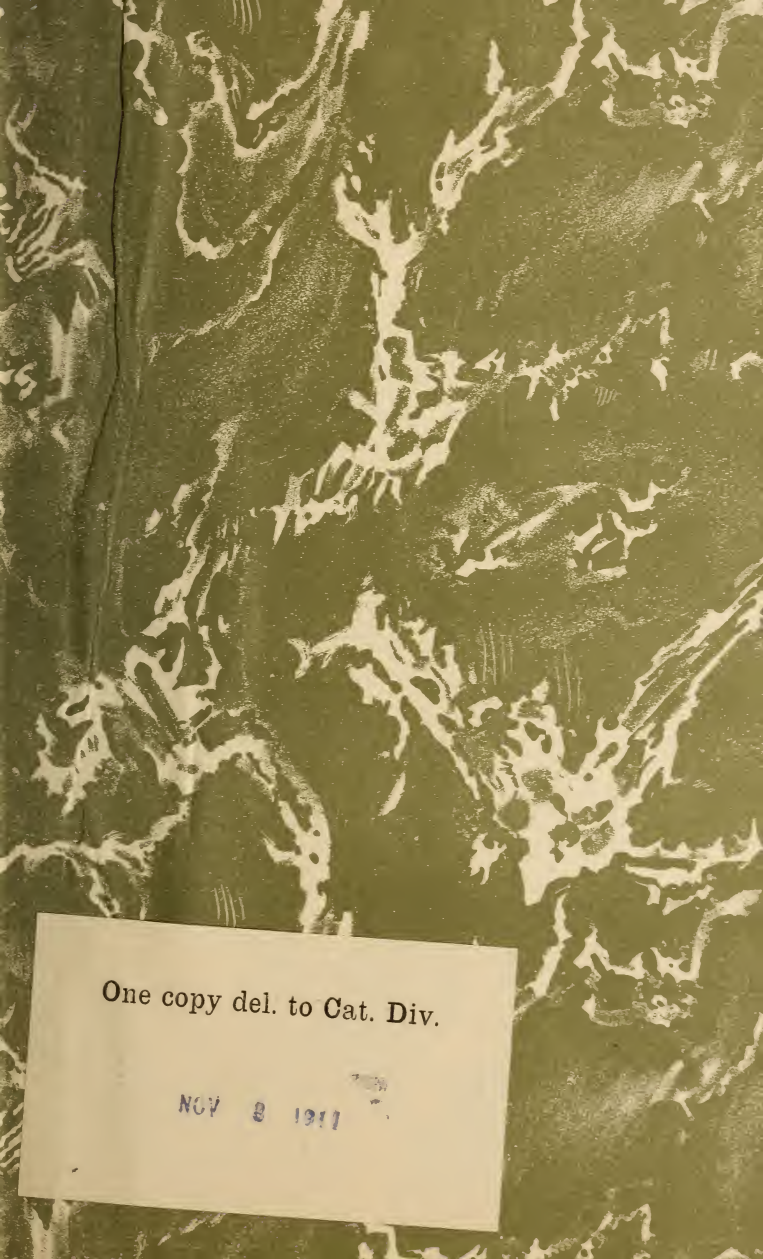
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